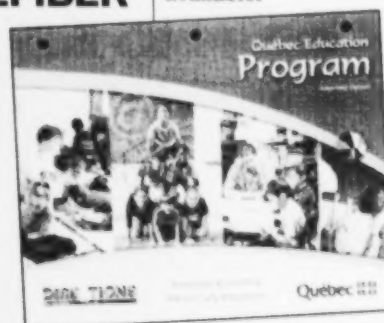


Schoolscapes

MESSAGE FROM FRANÇOIS LEGAULT, MINISTER OF STATE FOR EDUCATION AND YOUTH, FOR THE NOVEMBER 2001 ISSUE OF VIRAGE AND SCHOOLSAPES

The approved 2001 version of the Québec Education Program is now available.



November . . . The 2001-2002 school year is well under way. For you, the teachers, education consultants, administrators and other members of the education community who keep the schools running, the beginning of the school year is already a thing of the past. It is now, however, the beginning of the season for *Schoolscapes*, your information bulletin on the education reform. It gives me pleasure to mark the occasion by underlining the invaluable role you play in making success possible for young Quebecers.

I want first of all to thank you for your commitment to the education of young people, and for the professional attitudes you display in your work. Our efforts to foster educational success would be a waste of time without your contribution. My wish is to see schools become even more open to the community. I

want education to be recognized as a challenge facing society as a whole—one that involves everyone associated with the schools, and parents in particular. This said, it is still primarily your responsibility, as education professionals, to guide students through the schooling process.

I was proud of the new version of the Québec Education Program that I launched in August. This document, marks a turning point in our way of viewing education, while drawing on the competence and experience of all those presently working in the schools. It is on the cutting edge of educational progress, and has benefited from input from many teachers and education authorities. Because it addresses the concerns of young people while at the same time challenging them to excel, it is motivating for students and will go far towards making school enjoyable for them.

An important characteristic of the new curriculum is that it will prepare young people to participate fully in society, because in addition to acquiring basic learnings, they will develop competencies that enable them to interact with their environment. They will learn to work effectively, to cooperate with others, to communicate appropriately, to use information and to solve problems, and these competencies, which they will develop at school, will be invaluable to them for the rest of their lives. I also want to stress the concern for the quality of students' language of instruction that is manifest throughout the Québec Education Program.

To achieve its greatest effectiveness as a tool, the new curriculum depends on you teachers and other members of the school team. It is an invitation to make full use of your expertise and creativity. It will also favour a better evaluation of learnings by the various professionals who work with the students.

In this second year of the implementation of our great project, I urge you to adopt the Québec Education Program as your main pedagogical reference work, to use it as a tool to help your students achieve success. As Minister of Education, I assure you that you have my support: we will do everything within our means to help. And I wish you an excellent school year!

François Legault



On August 24, Education Minister François Legault launched the approved version of the Québec Education Program, which replaces the version unveiled in 2000. It has undergone extensive validation by the Commission des programmes d'études and representatives from the school and university communities, and represents a re-thought, rewritten version of the original Program. In addition to standardizing all the subject-specific competencies, the rewrite has made it possible to indicate cultural references more systematically, to identify the connections between subject-specific and cross-curricular competencies more precisely and to clarify end-of-cycle outcomes at the elementary level.

(Continued on page 4)

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Like the preceding version, the new Québec Education Program focuses on students and the quality of their learning. Its content is meaningful and motivating for students who aspire to meet and even go beyond the challenges of the 21st century. It leaves plenty of room for teachers to exercise their creativity while respecting their professional expertise. Learnings and strategies are more clearly articulated within the competency-based approach. The synergy existing between subject-specific competencies, cross-curricular competencies and the broad areas of learning is made clearer in the 2001 version. The indication of connections among the competencies also underscores the intended synergistic effect. It is nonetheless possible for readers to apply their own pedagogical models.

The revision process has given greater prominence to the subject-specific learnings. The essential knowledges are based on more demonstrable learnings and on strategies and techniques that are specific to each subject, and which are highlighted by the new document design. The treatment of the subject-specific competencies leads to a more explicit, clearer cross-curricular interpretation, thus favouring an integrated approach. A fuller explanation is given of the role of the cross-curricular competencies. Finally, the broad areas of learning encourage consideration of the major issues and challenges that will face the young citizens of tomorrow.

Clearer, shorter and more precise, but in keeping with the spirit of the reform over the past three years, the new Québec Education Program successfully incorporates the changes that prompted the Ministère de l'Éducation to propose a new version.

THE QUÉBEC EDUCATOR'S WEB SITE

Québec Éducation
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Représentation
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A synergistic combination of the QESN team, the local RÉCIT (information and communications technology (ICT) resource people in each school board) and the new provincial service, the QESN RÉCIT:

Communicates

- and promotes the integrated pedagogical use of ICT across the curriculum in the spirit of the Québec Education Program
- via our Web site
- via workshops
- via conferences at Board, regional and provincial levels

Collaborates

- with the MEQ Task forces and committees
- within the team and with local Board consultants
- with our francophone RÉCIT colleagues
- with other partners in the anglophone community—universities, Télé-Québec (Services à la clientèle anglophone) The Learning Materials Center, etc.

Fosters our community

- through collaboration and communication
- by supporting educators locally to reap benefits at a provincial level by networking, creating partnerships, pooling expertise and by publishing tools and resources
- by bringing together people who share the same concerns or face the same challenges

Our Web site: www.qesnrécit.qc.ca

- subject areas in step with the Québec Education Program: English Language Arts, Français langue seconde et immersion, Social Sciences et l'univers social, Mathématiques, Science & Technologie
- portfolio—theory, resources, teacher tools—a bilingual resource center
- connected classroom—ICT ideas, Web sites and great supported "learn-by-doing" projects
- RÉCIT—links to your Board ICT resources
- education reform in Québec—you can find all MEQ publications here
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NEW site components for 2001-2002

- Provincial calendar of professional development activities
- Provincial and board-wide events—Want to know what's going on? Check it out!
- Insight—Dedicated to inclusive education and funded by the Ministère de l'Éducation du Québec, Insight will keep you up-to-date on what's new, help you access educational resources and provide links to other relevant sites.

RÉCIT: Un réseau de personnes ressources pour développer des compétences des élèves par l'intégration des technologies (no English equivalent)



Some 450 residents of the Îles-de-la-Madeleine, Gaspésie and Bas-Saint-Laurent regions gathered in Rimouski on May 31 and June 1, 2001 to participate in the 17th Forum pédagogique régional, entitled "Getting on board." The number of participants greatly exceeded the organizers' hopes—a true sign that the reform has taken off in the regions.

The participants included 350 teachers, mostly from elementary schools but with a few from secondary-level educational institutions. "In our region, the reform represents a commitment, an adventure in renewal and creation, and a great challenge, and many of our teachers have eagerly taken up that challenge," said Yvon Landry, chairman of the organizing committee.

The challenge is also related to the characteristics of the region, where 54% of elementary schools have fewer than 100 students, 18% of classrooms have multi-grade programs, and 78% of elementary schools have multi-grade classrooms. This situation creates special difficulties concerning access to resource persons, meetings of teachers, classroom management, the adaptation of instructional materials, the evaluation of learnings and cycle-based organization. "These are the challenges that we face, and we are certain that we can meet every one of them," affirmed the chairman.

The two-day event included about 20 conferences, presentations and workshops. The Virage team was present, and its account reflects some of the region's dynamic character:





The career project:

Elisabeth Malazon, a professor in the Education department at l'Université du Québec à Rimouski (UQAR), is convinced that young people need a career project in order to establish a sense of purpose in school and to have a motive for entering the job market. As things stand now, schools are losing too many young people. These drop-outs have plenty of potential; what they lack are career goals, and, indeed goals in general. The solution? Malazon thinks the guidance-oriented approach can make a significant difference.

Her questions and hypotheses grew out of her experience as a teacher in both vocational education and general education and her research on the development of career projects by students in programs leading to semi-skilled occupations and the relationship between theory and practice in work-study practicum.

For the past three years, she has been studying young Quebecers who opt for programs leading to semi-skilled occupations. Her current research involves 160 students. Since 1984, the Ministère de l'Éducation has allowed young people aged 15 or over to enroll in a one-year, 900-hour program that includes courses in French and mathematics and a practicum. "In reality, these students are drop-

outs," explains Malazon. "The research shows that young people enroll in the training program and take a practicum—for example in cooking, baking, janitorial service or shoe-making—but that 90% of them have no career projects at all; not even dreams. Why do 15- and 16-year-olds drop out, and why do they have no idea where they are headed?"

The challenge of providing youth with proper guidance

Malazon has made a number of observations in the course of her research. "Young people do not bear sole responsibility for this situation," she observed. "They are operating within a specific socioeducational and socioeconomic framework."

That socioeducational framework is focused on performance. There is one educational model that is valued by society above all others: to finish Secondary V, attend CEGEP and then go to university. Yet this path is by no means appropriate for all young people, as shown by the fact that 30% of them drop out before earning a Secondary School Diploma. "We must not overlook these young people at risk," the professor insists. "But what are we doing for them? They begin to be at risk in Secondary I and sometimes even in elementary school. For example, students who enter this program are 15 years old and have only completed Secondary II." Malazon notes that vocational education is not very highly regarded and is rarely suggested to students

as an option. "So far," she says, "it's the same as in Europe: you're supposed to get into CEGEP—you're not supposed to end up in vocational education! And yet, workers in these trades earn a good learning. There is very little unemployment in these areas. The workers are trained in the latest techniques." She admitted there has been a certain change in attitudes towards vocational education, which the Ministère de l'Éducation has been trying to promote. "But the emphasis continues to be on the Secondary School Diploma or the Diploma of College Studies as proper goals for students," she says.

In socioeconomic terms, globalization has influenced hiring criteria, creating a demand for more specialized workers. Young people who drop out of secondary school no longer meet employers' needs. "Nowadays, big businesses want workers with at least a Secondary V in mathematics and physical science. Young people who have dropped out in Secondary V are simply not hired," according to Malazon. "Globalization marginalizes a whole sector of the population." The unemployment rate among young people aged 15 to 18 is 24.4% in Québec, compared to 8.2% in the general population. By comparison, in the United States 35% of young people are unemployed, while the general unemployment rate is 4.5%. "Another problem is that young people fail to get relevant work experience because they do not receive adequate guidance. We have to redefine training procedures and the school-to-work transition to provide young people with the guidance they need, so that they know what they want, and even do practicums in the workplace so that they can acquire experience. The main challenge is providing appropriate guidance."

Guidance practice

In the course of her research on young people in programs leading to semi-skilled occupations, Malazon has learned that:

- most ended up in the program without really knowing why
- 95% of them have no career project
- they have utopian, unrealistic career aspirations
- they have unrealistic images of school and the workplace
- they know little about the job market
- they hope to have a family and material possessions some day (95.5% want a family, a house and a car)

Guidance practice

Professor Malazon has also examined the situation of guidance counselling and identified several problem areas. First, there are so many programs and career options that it is difficult, even for a guidance counsellor, to be well-informed about every program. "So how can we ensure that young people get the information they need?" she asks. "We have to teach them to obtain it themselves and that means they have to be actively involved in planning their career."

Another problem is the ratio of guidance counsellors to students. In 1989, it was 1 per 875 students; now it is 1 per 1700 students. "Young people, and at-risk students in particular, need to get information, talk things through, have someone available. In the present situation, that is difficult. So, the guidance counsellors run tests on the students, which takes less time. They can't help it; they have too many students to deal with."

Malazon also observed a trend towards the elimination of career choice courses, which are often viewed as useless. "But they're useful," she insists. "Often, these courses motivate young people to seek further information on their own."

She pointed out another problem related to guidance. About 35% of college students change their study plans. The result is that the cost of their college education rockets: 55% of students at the college level pay the "failure tax" after the first semester. "This amount is equivalent to a year's rent for young people—that's what changing direction costs them. If their parents pay, obviously there's no problem, but if they are on their own, what happens? They get discouraged and drop out. These are students who had the potential to succeed. So then, either they find a job with their uncompleted DCS, or they remain unemployed. They are socially marginalized. A young person without a job is automatically marginalized, especially in the big cities. These young people drop out bit by bit because they do not have any sense of direction."

The guidance of vocational school

The Ministère de l'Éducation proposed the idea of the guidance-oriented school to ensure that educational institutions help young people find their way in the course of their schooling. The Ministère defines the guidance-oriented school in terms of a concerted effort by the school-team and partners to set objectives and establish individual and collective services



and learning activities designed to help students develop their identity and make career-related choices.

Does this mean that teachers, in addition to the specific subject content for which they are responsible, must now suggest classroom learning activities to provide career guidance? "I believe it is possible to reconcile the two," Malazon says. Using a project-based approach, teachers will help young people to develop the methodological skills required to begin planning their careers, at least by exploring their tastes and aspirations.

According to Malazon, it is possible to do this simply on a daily basis. First, teachers have to make a point of referring to various trades and professions in order to contextualize school learning. They do not have to be familiar with every occupation, often it is enough just to relate the subject taught to certain trades—by mentioning that a good knowledge of geography is necessary for a tourist guide, surveyor, geographer, or a climatologist, for example. "And from time to time, the teacher should choose an occupation for in-depth consideration," she says. She also suggests establishing connections between the subject content of a given course and the focus of a related program of study. On a day-by-day basis, the frequent use of formative and shared evaluation can also help young people become aware of the way they function in a project. It is not enough to evaluate a finished product; the process the student used and his or her intentions and actions are also important.

Encouraging students to become familiar with their interests and abilities is essential in order to help them decide what they want to do. They must be allowed to make choices. For example, in the context of a project about birds, some students will participate in building birdhouses, while others will prefer doing research on the birds found in their region, and still others will be interested in defining the characteristics of birds. "They should choose according to their preferences, be it cabinet-making, architecture, biology, geography, or whatever." If a project concerns a particular country, a television program or music, it is preferable for the students to choose the subject according to their interests. In addition to expressing their likes, they will be more motivated. Informing young people about extra-curricular activities is another simple, but effective means of providing guidance. Participating in an artistic, cultural, academic or sports activity may enable them to discover certain areas of interest, or to develop and diversify their tastes and inter-

ests. "By getting involved in projects, they will see what they like," explains the professor.

Malazon also underlines the importance of encouraging professionals to participate in the school's guidance-related activities. "I recognize that this is more difficult. The school teams have to help the teachers to establish a bank of professionals or businesses," she acknowledges. "That could be one of a school's first projects." She also observed that visits to workplaces should be planned in order to interest the students.

In school

To integrate the idea of career projects into teaching, Malazon suggests that teachers should:

- make a point of referring to trades and professions in order to contextualize school learning;
- encourage students to learn about their tastes and aptitudes;
- establish connections between the subject content of a given course and the focus of a related program of study;
- encourage the participation of professionals;
- make sure students are aware of extra-curricular activities and their potential advantages;
- make frequent use of formative and shared evaluation;
- integrate visits to workplaces.

What is Lavoisier?

"You cannot have a project without action," Malazon maintains. At the outset, a project was part of a behaviourist paradigm rather than a constructivist and social constructivist one, although both paradigms have contributed to its definition since then. Thus, for example, a project cannot simply be reduced to a desire or a vague intention, because it involves three types of reflection: on the present situation, the desired outcome and the means for getting from here to there (Guichard, 1993).

Professor Malazon and one of her students, Chantal Fauché, studied the concept of the project among young people. "We realized that they had no projects, but that does not mean there was nothing happening in their life," she explains. "Young people all have tastes, values and aspirations. In pursuing a project, the important thing is to begin by formulating one's intentions (likes and interests, goals and objectives), and then to take action and apply a procedure (planning, ranking of priorities, organizing, identifying obstacles, choosing resources) for the achievement of a given goal (action, schedule, results)."

In elementary and secondary school, young people have aspirations, but they rarely have a career project or any other sort of plan. Thus, teachers focus on the emergence and identification of the students' interests, tastes and aspirations.

"It makes me smile when people propose the guidance-oriented school and project-based learning beginning at the elementary level," says Malazon. "I'm not against it, but it is not possible for all young people." Psychological research shows that young people only become capable of completing a project at the age of 18. Prior to that, they go through various stages that are essential to their development.

First stage: synchronizing wants (ages 3 to 10). At this age, young people are only able to identify what they like and dislike. Their mode of operation is emotional: they have wants. "You can use the project-based approach with them, but they are not yet capable of handling all the stages of a project. The school team will take care of things, and the project will work out fine. But whose project is it in that case? It is no longer the students' project, but that of a system. I'm not saying it's of no value at this age, but rather that one should not expect more from young people than they are capable of."

Between the ages of 10 to 12, young people carry out a general exploration of their environment. "They know there is an environment, but they do not understand it," explains Malazon. "This is an important stage, in Secondary I and II, when students develop formal operational thought, and are able to organize, identify, categorize, classify and rank." Then, from 14 to 18, young people are mainly preoccupied with getting to know themselves. Gradually they develop a sense of who they are. "They are egocentric," she says. By this point, they are capable of abstract thought. It is during this stage that a career project begins to emerge. The students are capable of exercising critical judgment concerning their environment, of engaging in reflection and of defining a project. At age 18, the students reach the stage of following through on a project and developing strategies. "An 18-year-old can accept the idea of failure and the need to modify elements of a plan. Only then is it possible to transform failure into a positive experience and to repeat the process from the beginning until one gets it right." By this point, the students know what the goal of their project is, and why they are undertaking it.

"Obviously there are various sorts of maturity," she observes. "For example, if young people have never learned to be autonomous, they will not be by the time they turn 18. If, on the other hand, they have been learning ever since early childhood that they can achieve or attain something by working at it, then they will."

Project-based learning

Since the beginning of the reform, project-based learning has had a very high profile as a teaching approach. "And that is fine," Malazon recognizes, but she suggests that we give it a closer look. According to Lavoisier (2000), this approach is designed to lead students to apply and integrate knowledge and skills while creating a product or work. "What interests us is the individual work strategy that the student has to develop," she explains. "Many people say that the project-based approach is the purest expression of social constructivism. They are mistaken. It was initially a behaviourist approach. All behaviour is goal-directed. Constructivism made it possible to say that the students construct their knowledge, which took the concept a bit further, and social constructivism added the requirement that students work in teams, but in fact a project does not automatically entail teamwork." Even within a team, each student makes an individual contribution: it is by carrying out their own process that they contribute to that of the team. Thus, project-based learning involves both a collective and an individual process.

Evaluation

Evaluation is an essential step. Given that planning a project is a conscious activity and that acting on plans involves intention, it is important to evaluate not only the result of their project, but also the process they used. "Evaluation enables teachers to verify all the activities that have been carried out," adds Malazon. "Several means should be used for evaluation purposes. Students should be marked on their written or oral work, but above all, they should develop skills that will enable them to undertake and complete other projects."

To carry out the evaluation, teachers must bear in mind the following characteristics of project planning:

- it is a conscious activity
- it involves formulating an intention
- it involves setting a goal
- it involves using a number of means to attain this goal
- it is developed through successive activity programs

Malazon proposes an evaluation model that she has tried with her students. It comprises several means of evaluation: collective and individual interviews, self-evaluation by the students, coevaluation by classmates and an analysis of the students' portfolios. "Using different means of evaluation leads students to see the evaluation activities as part of the project," she says. Thus, during the evaluation process, students express their concept of the project, their aims, the process they have adopted and the difficulties they have encountered. Finally, they evaluate whether they have attained their objectives or not, and why. They also have the advantage of external evaluation by their classmates and teacher, which gives them an opportunity to re-examine what they have done and to make any necessary adjustments.

Impact of the project-based approach

Professor Malazon identified certain pitfalls of the project-based approach. One, of a social nature, consists in focusing only on the product, without taking into consideration the process. Another, of a rational nature, consists in planning everything in advance without taking into account each student's autonomy and individual approach: this is the technocratic pitfall. Finally, there is the pitfall of excessive spontaneity: an emotional pitfall that involves basing a project on an idea, rather than on young people.

"Our project-based approach has to be coherent and we must always bear in mind that the guidance-oriented approach is supposed to lead young people to make plans and to develop their skills, especially their methodological skills," recalls Malazon. "If we could achieve all that by this means, it would be wonderful."

For a guidance-oriented future

- inform students about occupations;
- provide guidance without judgment;
- encourage the development of collective projects, but without over-emphasizing them;
- facilitate access to student services;
- provide financial and moral support for the initiatives of school staff;
- develop partnerships with the community.



The road to success

While touring the regions of Quebec, Education Minister François Legault stopped at Rimouski to attend the 17th Forum pédagogique régional. He saluted the work of the artisans of the reform in the regions and outlined the challenges that lie ahead. "I am pleased to be here because the subject of this Forum is one I care deeply about: the reform and the success of our children," said the Minister.

Clearly the Minister of Education has taken the reform to heart, and he is not about to say so. "I support the reform by choice and by conviction because I think it's best for young people, but also because I believe that this major reform and the success plans that we are implementing in our schools mark the beginning of a fundamental change in the way we do things in Quebec."

By the time he reached Rimouski, the Minister had already visited a dozen of Quebec's regions. What he had seen during this tour was gratifying. "Throughout Quebec, more and more people are committed to education," he observed. There are countless innovative projects in the schools, and more and more, these projects are cooperative efforts by teachers, parents and partners in the community. "Since the Quiet Revolution, we have worked very hard to make education accessible, and now we are undertaking a new revolution ensuring that more children succeed."

What does he have to say about the Quebec Education Program? The Minister reaffirmed the importance of the new curriculum, the cornerstone of the reform. Its main role is to improve the quality of students' learning while at the same time increasing their rate of success. "Unfortunately, some commentators have tried to present these two options as mutually exclusive, claiming that in seeking to ensure that more children succeed, we were aiming for the lowest common denominator, which is not the case," said Legault. "With this reform, we must begin by enhancing the quality of program content."

First of all, there is the competency-based approach, subject-specific and cross-curricular competencies-fostered by the Quebec Education Program. "I think these competencies are central to the reform, and to our approach to pedagogy," said the Minister. There is also a desire to return to basic knowledge, to reconcile the various kinds of learnings and to concentrate on the essential subjects: French or English—depending on students' mother tongue—and mathematics and history.

According to the Minister, the reform is gradually taking root in the schools. This spring, the Ministère de l'Éducation carried out a survey among teachers and received 7800 responses. "The results are very encouraging: a great majority of our respondents agree with the basic premises of the reform, and I am also pleased to see that the schools have begun to produce instructional materials that are in keeping with the ideas of the reform."

Nevertheless, there are adjustments still to be made. Some teachers have raised concerns, which the Ministère has heeded. According to Legault, they fall into four categories.

The first has to do with the Quebec Education Program. "Most teachers can easily distinguish between subject-specific and cross-curricular competencies, but they feel that the programs should be clearer," the Minister observed. "By the time they raised these issues, the Quebec Education Program was already being rewritten. Indeed, the new version has been available in Quebec schools since the month of August. The members of my staff and I read through the whole thing to make sure that all the programs are clear and understandable."

Resources are the second concern. Initially a budget of 10 million dollars a year was set aside for professional development for teachers, among other things. "But this is not enough," Legault acknowledged. A new budgetary allocation of 14 million dollars has been made, and an assessment is currently being conducted to establish how much is needed to release school staff for training in team work.

Another concern is the pace of implementation. "It's not a race, schools should proceed at their own speed," the Minister assured his audience. The reason why some schools are implementing the reform more rapidly than others is perhaps that, even before the implementation, 20% of schools were already using some of the new approaches proposed by the reform, including project-based learning. "For these teachers, the reform is probably not hard to implement. In other schools, however, there are teachers who have to assimilate the new approaches, and it will take some time before they feel completely at ease with them." This can take two or three years. "Some teachers feel pressured to proceed more rapidly," he observed. "Our system works well, and our purpose in introducing these new approaches and procedures is simply to improve it. We should act gradually to make sure that everyone is comfortable with the reform."

The issue of grade repetition is also a major concern. "We said that grade repetition should become an exceptional measure, and some people interpreted that to mean that there should be no more grade repetition at all. That is not what we said," explained Minister Legault. His position is based on at least a dozen reports from specialists showing that grade repetition is not always the appropriate measure and that other measures should be available. "We should be capable, among other things, of monitoring the success of children with difficulties."

In the elementary schools, 23% of the students repeat at least one year, a sobering figure according to the Minister. "It has been shown that children in this situation often lose their self-esteem, their self-confidence, their motivation and their friends." About 70% will drop out of secondary school. "We must reduce the incidence of grade repetition and find new ways to intervene," he recognized. "That means we will certainly have to allocate additional resources to give these students the support they need."

In light of this situation, the Ministère de l'Éducation established its policy and plan of action on special education, which will direct 180 million dollars a year to the schools. These resources will make it possible to reduce the number of students per class in kindergarten and first and second year of elementary school, especially in poorer neighbourhoods. This will result in the creation of 2 000 new teaching positions, in addition to the normal turnover, and about 1 000 positions for specialists to work with children with learning difficulties. "From now on, we have to have alternatives to grade repetition. There will always be children who repeat grades, but there must be a percentage somewhere between 23% and 0% that is more reasonable." Indeed, in late April, the school boards received a list of possible alternatives to grade repetition.

The objective of the success plans introduced by the Ministère de l'Éducation is to mobilize the schools to combat the problem of school dropouts in Quebec. "This will require more resources," recognized the Minister. "Each school also has to have a very clear idea of what it is doing, and for that, it will need a map and a plan. That is why I asked the schools and CIEEPs to establish success plans, which are management tools that specify concrete means of action."

The first step towards drawing up a success plan is establishing a diagnosis. "That involves making a comparison with schools in similar socioeconomic communities, in order to set realistic objectives and take advantage of means that have proved effective in other schools." The Minister notes that it is a common practice in many Quebec school boards to ensure that measures that have been successful in specific schools are shared with others.

Pleased with the work that has already been accomplished, most schools in Quebec have already submitted a success plan, the Minister urged the remaining schools to do likewise as soon as possible. "I believe it is worth doing," he maintained.

In 80% of success plans, the figures are clearly presented, and eloquent. "When you see a figure for the number of children who have dropped out, it isn't just statistics anymore, those figures represent human lives, people who have perhaps been socially marginalized for the rest of their lives," explained the Minister. "So, if we want to mobilize in order to ensure that 100% of young people obtain qualifications, the objective we set ourselves last year at the Québec Youth Summit, we have to be able to establish the figures and monitor trends."

Although quantitative objectives are not enough, and qualitative objectives are necessary as well, the figures are often very significant. Legault mentioned the telling example of the figures concerning grade repetition. "Considering that 70% of children who repeat a year in elementary school drop out of secondary school, it is clear that we must act early." The elementary schools that have submitted success plans plan to reduce the incidence of grade repetition over the next three years from the present rate of 23% to a cumulative 12%. At the secondary level, the schools hope to reduce dropping out from the present rate of 32% to 21% within the next three years. "These are ambitious objectives," said Legault.

The objectives set by the schools in the regions are equally impressive, although their grade repetition and dropout rates are already below the Quebec average. In the Gaspésie and the Bas-de-la-Mateline region, the grade repetition rate at the elementary level is currently 21.3%, and the schools are aiming for 16.7% within three years. In the Bas-Saint-Laurent, where the rate of 17.6% is the lowest in Quebec, the objective is to reduce it to 11.4%.

At the secondary level, the Gaspésie and the Bas-de-la-Mateline region has a dropout rate of 30.7% that is expected to fall to 22.5% in three years. The Bas-Saint-Laurent region already has a low dropout rate, 24.1%, and intends to reduce it to 14.5%. "These figures show that these people set a high value on education and that they already work hard," argues the Minister. "So it is worthwhile to set ambitious objectives and work towards them."

"The figures are worthless if we do not give ourselves the means to act on them," Legault stressed. The schools have already implemented some imaginative measures, including organized help with homework, catching-up workshops, catching-up sessions with classmates, help for parents with learning difficulties and joint projects with the community to create more activities in the schools after school hours.

"At the time of the Québec Youth Summit, we set aside 70 million dollars for school projects under the name L'École ouverte sur son milieu," stated the Minister. He encouraged schools to submit projects, developed in partnership with the community in order to obtain funding to set up more academic, sporting and cultural activities. During the Forum, the Minister will be giving \$524 000 to the developers of a project in the Bas-du-Fleuve region, "Le secondaire en spectacle" (showcasing secondary school). This is a project to organize workshops and other activities for young people in the region. "It is a fine opportunity to get our young people motivated," explains the Minister. "Because if one third of young people are dropping out, it reflects a lack of motivation, and the remedy for that is to make schools active and stimulating."

The success of the reform depends on a general commitment by students, parents, teachers, professionals, administrators, school boards and members of the community. "If we want our students to be more successful, we as a society should begin by placing greater value on education, and the first step is to fully appreciate the work that is accomplished by the teachers in Quebec schools."

The Minister insisted on the importance of getting parents involved. "If all parents spent half an hour a day helping their child with homework, the rate of success would surely rise," he maintained. "Unfortunately, some parents find it more difficult than others to help their child. As a society, we must show solidarity with these parents, and find adults to help them within the framework of the L'École ouverte sur son milieu project or some other project, for example, by helping with homework."

François Legault has a dream. He wants the two, three, four or even five students in each class who have learning difficulties to be identified and to receive support in their school activities, and he wants everyone to join in a war on failure and dropping out. "Let us bear in mind that no school can exist without participation, commitment and a sense of community. Let us not forget that equal opportunity and equal opportunity between the generations begins at school. Every adult in Quebec should take part in this noble project to make education our priority and success our goal. We have to be capable of joining forces and taking action together: the future of Quebec society depends on it."



Merry they are indeed, but castaways! "After forty years weathering the storms of curriculum reform—reform to port, reform to starboard—we sometimes feel we're getting nowhere." Ginger and Gelligan are discouraged, and get the feeling they're just drifting. But the merry castaways finally find their way with the help of their good friend Jynnie!

Confused? The Pipers-Bédard theatre group based the characters in their play "I am the Queen of the transfer of learning" on TV classics. The play which they presented at the 17th Forum pédagogique régional in Rimouski, uses a humorous approach to demystify the vocabulary and ideas of the reform. Thus Ginger (Dominique Bédard), Gelligan (Jacques Pipers) and Jynnie (Mireille Lévesque) take the audience on a long voyage during which they discover the meaning of competencies and meet up with the concepts of objectives, orientations, and mission. ... These are the maps and compasses they need to guide them!



LAUNCH OF FOUR SITE-BASED ELA PROJECTS

The launch of four "new generation" projects in English Language Arts took place on Monday, September 24, 2001 at the Holiday Inn Montclair Midtown, hosted by C.E. Levy, Director-General of English-Montreal School Board.

Kevin Lukian, Director-General of Riverside School Board, Elizabeth Speyer, Director of Pedagogical Services at the Lester-B. Pearson School Board and Abigail Anderson, Coordinator of Curriculum for English Language Arts at the Direction de la formation générale des jeunes (MEQ), each of the four projects was presented by the teams of teachers, students and consultants who produced them. The projects involved a partnership between English Language Arts at the DFG (MEQ) and the school boards and were subsidized by federal funds for the development of resources in English Language Arts education. Following the presentations, the 130 guests mingled over wine, soft drinks and hors d'oeuvres.

Although English Language Arts at the MEQ has been active in site-based projects since 1992, working in collaboration with teams of teachers and school boards around the province to produce classroom resources in such areas as learning across the curriculum, essential competencies, media literacy and portfolios, the four projects that were launched in the context of the Curriculum Reform represent important changes regarding the concept of the professional resource, the contexts in which meaningful resources can be devel-

oped and models of collaborative activity in our educational community.

The first project to be presented was a manuscript entitled, *Reforming Our Vision of English Language Arts: Classroom Stories*. The concept for the project was developed by Myrna Hynes, a member of the ELA writing team at the MEQ, in collaboration with teachers from kindergarten to secondary school in the Riverside School Board. Following an introduction by Kevin Lukian, the teachers involved in the project were presented with Crossley, Elizabeth Ford-Makarewicz, Jennifer Goodall, Tanya Parada, Karen Rye, Josée Salvatoris, Dorothy Shaw, Stephanie Yucko and Trudy Williams. The manuscript featured articles that were written by these teachers illustrating some of the new features of the English Language Arts program. Embedded in their classroom stories are such concepts as success for all, the role of talk in learning, student self-evaluation, reflection, cross-curricular competencies, media literacy and the learning process, with a focus on learning how to learn. The accounts are richly illustrated with samples of students' work and examples of the decision-making processes that form the basis of teaching. The process the teachers used to create this manuscript of stories is also interesting: they formed their own support group, an effective model of professional development for making the kind of changes that the new curriculum and the Reform require. One of the innovative aspects of this project is

its insistence on the rich, practical knowledge of teachers and on making connections between these ways of knowing and the key concepts of the Reform. While supporting the practices of experienced teachers, the project also makes clear that the standard for our profession is one of excellence.

The second site-based project to be launched was the magazine *Memories in Black And White*. It was written and produced by the students of the Media Education Department of Laurier-Macdonald High School in the English-Montreal School Board, in collaboration with their teachers, Frank Toso and Leon Lyevelles, Winston Emery (McGill) and Michele Luchs (ELA writing team, DFG) (MEQ). The project was introduced by Dr. Emery and its contributing editor, Cynthia Fortin who is now a student at Marianopolis College. *Memories in Black And White* is a compelling tribute to the power of media education and community in transforming learning in school to learning for life. It features family photographs that the students learned to restore, using an array of computer devices, coupled with their reflections about the lives portrayed in the photographs. These reflections follow the family histories that the students uncovered as they worked through the media education project that is described in their book *Rainbow of Dreams*, published last year. The magazine is a dramatic illustration of the role that schools play in helping students to claim their rich cultural heritage.

The third project, *Author's Day At Meadowbrook*, presents a model of teacher professional development that begins with teachers and children. The project was introduced by Elizabeth Speyer representing Lester-B. Pearson School Board and involved James Radoman (ELA writing team, DFG) (MEQ), Norm Horner, Curriculum Reform dossier at LPSB, teachers Ann Parker and Maria Tucci of Meadowbrook School, their students and their families. *Author's Day* the culmination of a year's collaboration between the teachers and Radoman, was filmed by James Goodman (Concordia University, Department of Communication Studies) and edited into slides under the direction of Michele Luchs. This is the story of 33 Cycle One and Cycle Two students, many of whom had struggled in school, who became joyful participants in a classroom community of readers and writers. *Author's Day At Meadowbrook* is also the story of their teachers, whose efforts to support the literacy learning of their students within the context of the Reform led them to create a dynamic that encouraged a love of reading and writing. The project raises the questions: What happens when professional development is connected to personal classroom experiences? What teacher education models provide practising teachers with ongoing support and reassurance that is relevant to their needs? How does ongoing collaboration among teachers help them to sustain pedagogical growth?

The evening ended with the showing of the video, *Going Digital: Using Portfolios in English Language Arts*. A collaborative project between the Riverside and English-Montreal School Boards and English Language Arts at DFG (MEQ), *Going Digital* portrays secondary teacher Jennifer Goodall and her Secondary II students (2000-2001) as they embark on a technology-based project in English Language Arts: the creation of digital portfolios that are burned onto CDs. The concept for the project was developed by Myrna Hynes and Michele Luchs with the support of Carol Marriott, Principal of Central Regional High School and the technical support of Maureen Baron (EPSB), Alan Taylor (EPSB), Skip Hobbs (RSB) and Norm Haslam (RSB). The 23-minute video captures Jennifer Goodall's thinking and planning, as well as the reflections, decision-making processes and productions of her students. Key elements of the Reform were featured in this project in order to ground the new ELA program in the reality of a typical secondary classroom. Since media literacy is unfamiliar territory for many teachers, this video should provide support and encouragement for those attempting to include it in their teaching. It will be distributed to school boards with an animator's guide in the spring of 2002.

Each of these four projects will be made available to the anglophone school boards between January and June 2002.

Schoolscapes is published by the preschool, elementary and secondary education sector.
Robert Bédard
Assistant Deputy Minister
Direction des services à la communauté anglophone
Elaine Freedland
Assistant Deputy Minister
Direction des politiques et des projets
Barbara Goode

Direction de la production en langue anglaise
Liette Michaud-Hodge
With the cooperation of:
Direction de la formation générale des jeunes
Margaret Roux-Dolan
Director
Huguette Drouin
Assistant Director

With the cooperation of:
Direction des communications
Columbie Clide
Director
Michel Martel
Editors-in-chief
Jean-Yves Daigle
Barbara Goode
Journalists
Phyllis Aronoff, Eve Krakow,
Wendy Mil, Pascale Saint,
Claudine St-Germain

Editorial Assistant
Denise Thériault
Graphic Design
Les Oranges Bleues
Distribution
La direction des ressources matérielles
Lise Duchesne
Distribution Code

ISSN 1488-3139 (Printed)
ISSN 1488-3147 (Online)

Québec 
Ministère
de l'Éducation